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SUBJECT: POPE ISSUES FORCEFUL ENVIRONMENTAL MESSAGE FOR WORLD PEACE DAY

¶1. (U) The deterioration of any one part of the planet affects us all, Pope Benedict said in his message for World Peace Day, Jan. 1, 2010 (released December 15). According to the Pope, the world's population cannot remain indifferent to environmental degradation. Government policies, the activity of multinational corporations and the day-to-day behavior of individuals all have an impact on the environment. Pope Benedict observed that while the future of the world hangs in the balance because of what people are doing today, in the present we can already see the negative effects of pollution and environmental exploitation.

¶2. (U) In his message, the pontiff drew attention to the growing phenomenon of environmental refugees, "people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat" to migrate in search of food, water and unpolluted air. Benedict warned of "actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources." He said the issue of environmental degradation challenges people to examine their lifestyles and models of consumption and production, "which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view." Because the environmental crisis is global, it must be met with a universal sense of responsibility and solidarity toward people in other parts of the world, as well as toward future generations, he concluded.

¶3. (U) Presenting the message to the press, Cardinal Renato Martino, recently retired president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, said Pope Benedict does not want to propose technical solutions or interfere in government policies. That is a job for governments. Rather, Martino said the Pope was reaffirming the Church's commitment to defend the earth, water and air. The Pope rejects the views of the two extremes when discussing the environment: that humans are free to do "whatever they want" with the Earth and that humans person is simply one group among the many creatures on Earth, with no special rights. "If the person has no special rights, he also does not have special responsibilities," the Cardinal said.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The Pope released his World Peace Day message early to have the strongest possible effect on final deliberations in Copenhagen. His message further substantiates his "green" reputation. His message is more complex than that of many environmental stewards, as he argues that humanity's responsibilities to care for the planet are part of a seamless moral imperative. He links ecology to a large range of issues like disarmament, freedom of religion, and the protection of human life from conception to natural death. End comment.

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